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ABSTRACT

This report describes the design, implementation, and impact of a book loan program in an inner-city preschool where books were freely and easily available to low-income primarily Spanish-speaking families, most of whom are recent immigrants. Data collected included check-out frequency, book titles, student participation, and field notes of the interactions between project staff and families during book check-out. In one year, book check-out increased from an average of 1.5 to 16 books per day, with 70% of eligible children checking out books. Six of the eight most popular books are Spanish titles. Questionnaires and field notes indicated that immigrant parents typically place a high value on books. Large turnouts (100 parents) at the two parent receptions/reading demonstrations were concrete evidence of parents' commitment to supporting their children's learning. Findings suggest that the program's success can be attributed to accessibility and the content of the literacy materials (books on culturally appropriate topics and in Spanish). Contains 53 references, 1 table and 6 figures of data; appendixes contain a preliminary assessment tool and book loan program parent responses. (Author/RS)

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Creating a Book Loan Program for Inner-City Latino Families

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University of Southern California

CIERA REPORT #2-003
June 15, 1999

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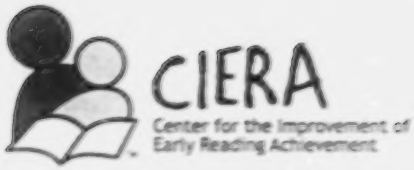
CIERA Inquiry 2: Home and School
What is the nature of *English* language and literacy support that can be provided to parents and young children in a primarily Spanish-speaking community? Can a book loan program operated out of a preschool in such a community make it easier for parents and children to participate in literacy activities together?

In this paper, Madrigal et al. describe the design, implementation, and impact of a book loan program in an inner-city preschool where books were freely and easily available to low-income primarily Spanish-speaking families, most of whom are recent immigrants. Madrigal et al. collected data on check-out frequency, book titles, and student participation, and took field notes of the interactions between project staff and families during book check-out.

In one year, book check-out increased from an average of 1.5 to 16 books per day, with 70% of eligible children checking out books. Six of the eight most popular books are Spanish titles. Questionnaires and field notes indicated that immigrant parents typically place a high value on books. Large turnouts (100 parents) at the two parent receptions/reading demonstrations were concrete evidence of parents' commitment to supporting their children's learning. Madrigal et al. attribute the program's success to its accessibility and the content of the literacy materials (books on culturally appropriate topics and in Spanish).

Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement
University of Michigan – Ann Arbor

June 15, 1999



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Creating a Book Loan Program for Inner-City Latino Families

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Literacy learning is an interactional dynamic where children learn about reading and writing in cultural and social contexts (Sulzby & Teale, 1991; Teale, 1987) which, according to Goldenberg (1990), involve numerous opportunities to interact with meaningful texts. However, according to the Carnegie Foundation (1991), approximately 35 of students matriculating into kindergarten are not prepared for literacy instruction (cited in Carr, 1994, p. 237). A primary reason for this is that these children have limited access to a wide variety of reading and writing materials. Unfortunately, these limited opportunities are likely to exist in the homes of many children from language minority backgrounds in high-poverty areas (Carr, 1994). For example, McCormick and Mason (1986) found that 47% of public-aid parents of preschool children reported a lack of alphabet books in the home, compared to only 3% of professional parents. Further, Goldenberg, Reese, and Gallimore (1992) found that factors such as literacy materials in the home were partly responsible for school effects on home literacy. In general, literacy research of the last decade (e.g., Goldenberg, 1989; Sonnenschein, Brody, & Munsterman, 1996) has shown that parent-child reading interactions, supported by the presence of a wide range of literacy materials in the home, are thought to contribute to a motivation to read. (See also Baker, Afflerbach, & Reinking, 1996).

The present study describes the first-year findings from the implementation of a book loan program at an inner-city preschool as one facet of a larger emergent literacy intervention conducted under the auspices of the federally funded Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA). The primary purpose of the Emergent Literacy Project (ELP) has been to provide multiple opportunities for Spanish-speaking three- and four-year-old children to engage in a variety of reading and writing activities within the preschool center and at home. Given the financial and transportation limitations as well as the time constraints of the working families of this community, it was deemed necessary to facilitate access to books by providing an on-site library for parents. The overall goal of the book loan program, specifically, was to increase access to books for families who were otherwise unable to visit the local library as well as to provide opportunities for more interaction with literacy materials for both parents and children at home.

In addition, since several studies (i.e., Baker, Allen, et al., 1996; Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1995, 1996; Teale, 1986) have shown that literacy interactions of considerable variety occur even within low-income families, another goal of the book loan program has been to discover the nature of the literacy environment for these children at home and the reading and writing interactions to which they are already exposed. We believe that understanding the types of interactions at home and the beliefs of these children's parents and adult caregivers can make both the book loan program and the larger ELP more responsive to the indigenous resources, needs, and expectations of their community (cf. also Baker, Allen, et al., 1996; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Moll & Greenberg, 1990). The central purpose, therefore, of the following discussion will be to describe the nature and growth of the book loan program over the past 11 months and its role in aiding the research team to realize some of the larger goals of the study.

Selected Literature Review

Literacy Interventions With Parent Components

Several early literacy intervention studies have focused their efforts on providing more books in the homes of low-income families and providing increased exposure to storybook reading activities in the classroom. For example, in a series of studies using the *Little Books* program aimed at encouraging parent-child and teacher-child book reading, Mason and colleagues (Mason, Kerr, Sinha, & McCormick, 1990; McCormick & Mason, 1989; Phillips, Norris, Mason, & Kerr, 1990) found that increasing the opportunity for involvement in more storybook reading at home led to steady progress toward higher emergent reading levels in preschool and kindergarten Head Start children during the first years of the intervention. In a study with Canadian children, Phillips, Norris, and Mason (1996) found that early gains in literacy were also sustained into the fourth grade as measured by standardized tests. Further, Whitehurst, Epstein, et al. (1994) incorporated a book-lending library at four Head Start centers in order to facilitate an at-home reading program in which parents were encouraged to read with their children at least three times a week over a nine-month period. At the end of the study, which also included classroom storybook reading and instruction in phonemic awareness, Whitehurst, Epstein, et al. (1994) reported that children whose caregivers had been actively reading with them at home increased on measures of expressive and receptive vocabulary.

In a widely quoted study, particularly relevant for the population of the present investigation, Goldenberg, Reese, and Gallimore (1992) distributed simple, predictable stories in the form of *Libros* to 16 families whose primary language was Spanish. Interestingly, even though the authors reported that literacy scores improved overall for the children involved, frequency counts and duration of use measures for interactions with the Libros at home did not correlate with school achievement scores, leading Goldenberg

et al. to conclude that perhaps the quantitative measures failed to capture the qualitative aspects of the children's book reading "—activities that ultimately influenced their school perfomance" (p. 528).

In our review of the above studies and others involving parents in book reading activities (see also Dickinson, 1989; Edwards, 1989; McCormick & Mason, 1989; Otto, 1993), we have noted two factors which characterize nearly all programs and which may relate to the "quality" issue which Goldenberg et al. (1992) found to be so elusive to measurement. First of all, nearly all of the studies used books with very simple, predictable text conducive much more to word recognition and letter-sound activities than to more literary experiences (cf. Sipe, 1998). Interestingly, Otto (1993) found in her study that kindergarten children who were exposed to traditional picture storybooks as opposed to predictable texts had a better understanding of complex language forms and demonstrated higher emergent reading levels on Sulzby's scale (1985) than their counterparts reading simplified texts.

Secondly, while parents were involved in the interventions as an important component, their involvement can be described in what Swap (cited in Baker, Allen, et al., 1996) has termed the School-to-Home Transmission Model, where "training" in school-related tasks is seen as most important and there is very little, if any, consideration of the "home curriculum" (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990, 1993; Delgado-Gaitan & Allexsaht-Snider, 1992). In other words, parents in almost all of the above cases had no choice of the books sent home, nor did they control the number received or the frequency with which they arrived. In addition, for the Whitehurst, Epstein, et al. (1994) study, the texts were altered to include glosses that added "hints for wh-prompts on each page and hints for recall prompts at the back of the book" (p. 547), taking all spontaneity out of parent-child storybook reading. While the fact remains that many storybook reading interventions, in particular, involving parental reading components almost always show both short- and some long-term gains (e.g., Phillips et al., 1996; see also Bus, van Ijzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; and Yaden, Rowe, & MacGillivray, in press, for reviews), parents usually have very little control over their role in the "partnership" other than compliance to a preset research design.

Creating Genuine Partnerships With Parents

A serious caveat to even the few programs that have demonstrated an increase in the literacy abilities of young Latino children is the general finding that the long-term school performance of Latino youth lags consistently behind other ethnic groups (August & Hakuta, 1997; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Galindo & Escamilla, 1995). However, according to Delgado-Gaitan (1996),

> many attempts to promote literacy and family-school relationships [in Latino communities] have limited effectiveness because they are driven by modernistic, capitalistic premises void of cultural affirmation and engagement of the local communities. The school system demands that parents advocate for their children in order to achieve academic success. A basic tenet holds that those with greater

> knowledge of how the system operates increase their access to educational resources. (p. 2)

Thus, as Delgado-Gaitan and Ruiz (1992) have noted, "while the notion of home-school partnerships suggests an equal power base, . . . we find meager evidence to support the notion that the home influences the school" (p. 47).

In the present book loan program and within the larger ELP intervention, we have attempted to adhere to principles of collaboration such as those outlined in programs like the Carpinteria Family Literacy Project (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990, 1996), the "funds of knowledge" approach (Moll, 1998; Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Moll et al., 1992), and the types of home-school partnerships described in Baker, Allen, et al. (1996). These types of programs, alternatively called Cooperative Systems models (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990, 1993), or Partnership models (Swap, 1993) are committed to the viewpoint that all partners in the educational process—teachers, children, parents, family—have indispensable and positive contributions to make in ensuring academic success.

In summary, our intervention philosophy shares at its core the particular belief, expressed so lucidly by Goldenberg et al. (1992), that

> parent involvement efforts in the area of early literacy might be more effective, and possibly more sustainable, when they build on parents' understandings and beliefs about how children learn to become literate. Our intervention plans must be informed by parents' understandings no less than by our own, presumably more scientific ones. (p. 530)

We also understand, however, that our views as university researchers as well as those of the parents and the agency staff and teachers with whom we interact are not static and must, as a function of that interaction, inevitably change. As Susan Florio-Ruane (1997) expressed in her Presidential Address to the Council on Anthropology and Education,

> If our stories of self are to help us reform institutions or build new communities, we need to be willing to reinvent them, repeatedly and in the company of others, embracing rather than defending ourselves from contact. . . . In our scholarship and our teaching, we must risk telling new stories in and by many voices. This is an act of hope. (p. 160)

Thus, our story begins.

Method

Participants and Setting

Located just east of downtown Los Angeles in an area known as "skid row" (Rivera, 1999), La Comunidad Juvenil (LCJ, a pseudonym) is a Comprehensive Child Care and Family Support Services Center whose stated mission is "raising children out of poverty, into a brighter future." While serving over 2,000 persons a year (800 of them children) in the downtown areas with a variety of educational and social services for children, teens, families, and after-school latch-key programs, the child care center houses approximately 136 children, from infants to four-year-olds. The book loan program is available to the parents and children of the three- and four-year-old classes in which there are, at the time of this writing, approximately 113 primarily Spanish-speaking Latino children and two English-speaking African-American four-year-olds.

For the most part, the parents of these children work in the nearby garment and toy wholesale districts, where economic conditions are increasingly harsh. According to LCJ's records, 55% of the families served are composed of single mothers with two or three children with an average monthly income per household of $584; it is estimated that over 98.7% of families have incomes below federal poverty guidelines. In addition, 35% of the children are prenatally exposed to drugs or alcohol, and many are at risk of abuse or neglect book

Figure 1. Hallway location of book loan library.

Book Loan Program Design and Operation

Location and display

The loan program is operated from the walkway directly across from the two four-year-old children's classrooms, thus providing access to the books by both parents and children when walking to the classroom or leaving the

building (see Figure 1). The loan program functions as a "traveling" book library where, during the hours of operation, the books are set up on book holders and shelf boxes or displayed on the counter and then stored in a cabinet when not in use.

Operation and check-out procedure.

The book loan program began operation in the last week of June 1998, at which time it was being coordinated by one of the preschool staff who assisted parents whenever they wanted to check books out or return them. However, due to other duties, the preschool staff could not always be available to assist parents with check-out, return, or choosing books. In only a few weeks, it was evident to the research team that in order for the program to function effectively, the on-site presence of a research team member during the hours of operation was essential. Therefore, since the beginning of August 1998, one member of the research team has staffed the library two days per week, between the hours of 3:30 p.m. and 5:15 p.m. when parents come to pick up their children after work.

Figure 2. Book loan showcase of family having checked out 20 books.

The three- and four-year-old students are allowed to check out one book at a time for a week, and a log is maintained in which the parents sign in and out for the books. This procedure allows for the documentation of check-out frequency and the most popular book titles. The children are provided with a plastic bag to carry and store their books, facilitating their commute. The parents are also provided with an "incentive card" which indicates the total number of books the child has checked out. Once a child has checked out 20 books, that child is awarded a free book of his or her choice and showcased on the library's bulletin board (see Figure 2). Given the program's design, all parents and children involved in the program can be showcased at one time or another.

At the present time, the book loan library operates without penalties for late returns or damaged books. After a long discussion about the wisdom of operating in this manner, coupled with the knowledge that many inner-city parents cannot afford to purchase library books which have been lost or damaged beyond repair, the research team decided that imposing fines and penalties exacerbated the parents' already stressed financial condition. To date, given the good faith shown by the parents themselves and the encouragement by the library staff member and the teachers to return books when they are overdue, the program's losses have been minimal. In fact, in several cases where books have been lost or damaged, parents have volunteered to replenish the supply, oftentimes with books of greater value than the ones that were lost.

The loan library inventory.

The book loan program has attempted to provide both easy, readable texts for emergent readers and a variety of multicultural picture storybooks; wordless picture books; and informational, counting, and alphabet books in both Spanish and English. Some of these books have bilingual texts as well. The program has been confronted, however, with some recurring problems in purchasing books in Spanish for this population, such as the frequent existence of poor translations from English to Spanish; expense; and the scarcity of alphabet, counting, and other informational books for young children written in Spanish. Parents have also asked for books which teach how to form words; apparently these books are available in Mexico, but we have not been able to locate them yet.

Data Collection

In addition to keeping the log book as a record of check-out frequency, most popular book titles, and student participation over the past 11 months, the research team member assigned to staff the library has taken field notes (see Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, for a description of exact format) recording incidences of parent-child interaction surrounding books and informal conversations with parents over a wide range of topics. Further, two parent book loan receptions have been held in November 1998 and May 1999 where, on a Friday afternoon, attending parents were invited to participate in half-hour miniworkshops on encouraging book reading at home. Topics for these workshops were suggested by the parents themselves and incorporated into the miniworkshops. A sample handout from the November reception is illustrated in Figure 3. Subsequently, during the workshop and the short meal afterwards, field notes of conversations, photographs, and video recordings were made to further document both the parents' and children's responses to the program.

In order to obtain more systematic information from parents, an open-ended questionnaire in Spanish (see Appendix A for the translated English version) was developed to provide information about the families' perceptions of the on-site book loan program, the characteristics and services of the program that promoted access to books, and aspects of the literacy knowledge and at-home practices of these families. For those parents who might have difficulty reading the questionnaire, a semistructured interview based upon the questionnaire was offered; one parent elected this option. In order to ensure that the participants remained anonymous during analysis, questionnaires

were numbered instead of identified by name. While a follow-up questionnaire was distributed in late May, the survey data in this paper is based upon the initial questionnaire passed out in October 1998. Of the 16 parents willing to respond in this manner, 11 questionnaires were returned.

Figure 3. Parent handout for miniworkshop during book loan reception.

PARENT HANDOUT 11-20-98
Reading Workshop Strategies

Two ways parents read books:

(1) **"Reading" the pictures to find out what is going on in the storybook.**

- This skill helps the child know that the words and the pictures on the same page are related and meaningful.

(2) **Parts of a BOOK – Point out to the child**

- The title on the front cover of the book
- The back cover of the book
- The author and illustrator of the book
- The first page to read
- How to turn the pages
- When to turn the pages

Two more strategies for parents to use:

(3) **Directionality**

- Front to back of the book
- Top to bottom of the page
- Left to right on the page

(4) **Tracking the printed words on the page**

- Point to each word with your finger
- Return to the beginning of the next line

We thank all of you for supporting the children, other parents and our team members – David, Patricia, Ana, Camille, Danny & Terri – as we discover that there are many good reasons for sharing books with children.

Data Analysis

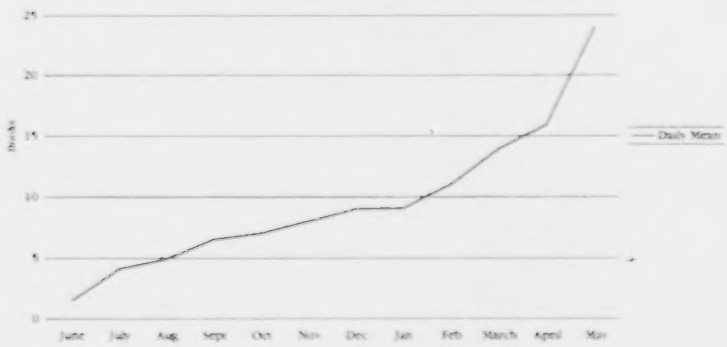
From the archival data recorded in the book loan log, descriptive frequencies have been computed for the (a) daily rate of check-out, (b) monthly rate of increasing child participation, and (c) titles of the most commonly circulated books. The analysis also draws from responses to the 11 surveys returned by parents, as well as field notes describing informal conversations with parents and observations at the loan program and elsewhere when relevant. The questionnaire and field note data have been analyzed according to procedures outlined by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995), with particular

attention given to understanding the families' points of view in identifying common themes.

Results

The findings from this study will be presented in four major sections. The first section includes descriptive frequencies of the rate of book check-out, the rate of child participation, and a ranking of the most popular books. The following three sections summarize results gleaned from the parent questionnaires and the field notes taken in conjunction with the book loan program under the general headings of (a) parents' and children's perceptions of the book loan program, (b) parents' beliefs about literacy and home practices, and (c) parents' expectations for the book loan program.

Figure 4. Chart showing daily mean of books checked out over a 12-month period.



Access

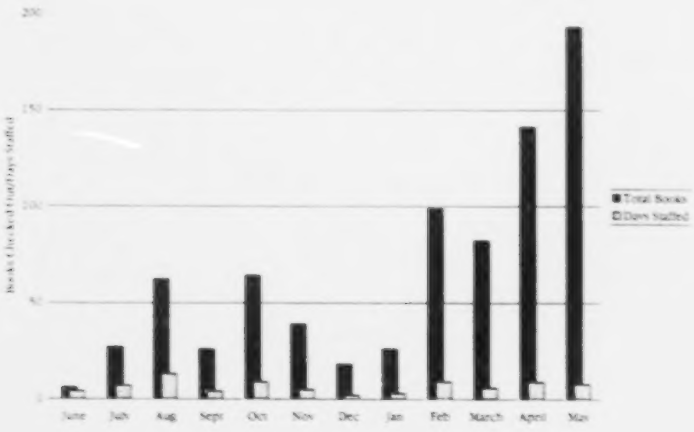
Rate of checkout.

A pivotal point in the operation of the loan library occurred in mid-July (7/14/98), when the loan library began to be coordinated by a research team member at least two times a week. At that time the book check-out rate increased dramatically, from approximately 1.5 books per day in June to 4 books per day by the end of July (see Figure 4). Subsequently, since July 1998, the daily mean of books being checked out per day that the program has been open has increased steadily over the past 11 months from 4 to more than 20 books per session.

Though the number of days the loan program was open fluctuated from one month to another (due to holidays and research team attendance at conferences), parents have not been deterred from using the library at an increasing rate. The chart in Figure 5 shows the ratio of books checked out to days

that the program was open. From the fall of 1998 to the spring of 1999, though the number of days the program was open has remained relatively constant, the number of books being checked out per month has risen dramatically from a high of 62 in October to 141 at the end of April.

Figure 5. Chart showing ratio of books checked out vs. days the library was staffed.



Rate of participation.

Initially, the book loan program was only open to the parents of the two classes of four-year-old children during the months of June and July. In August, however, after the parents of the three-year-olds had expressed interest in participating, a total of 19 new students were added to the program, and the rate increased from 12 children regularly checking out books in July to 30 children in August. Figure 6 shows the number of children participating in the program has risen dramatically as well from fall to spring, more than doubling since the inclusion of the three-year-olds last August. Currently, of the 113 children in the three- and four-year-old classes, 50% (26 out of 52) of the three-year-olds are participating and 87% (53 out of 61) of the four-year-olds are involved in the program. All in all, of the children eligible to check out books, 70% are making use of the book loan program.

Most popular books.

Listed in Table 1 is a ranking of the most popular books as measured by frequency of check-out. For the most part, as indicated by our observational data, these are also the books that the children themselves chose, rather than their parents. Of the eight most popular books, two are counting books in English and six are picture storybooks in Spanish.

In the following three sections, we turn from the quantitative aspects of the program to the interpretive data that we have collected. In these sections, data from the questionnaires and field notes are presented in the form of several "stories" and actual statements (translated) made by the parents. While data is summarized in the ensuing discussion, all of the responses from the open-ended questionnaires are recorded in Appendix B.

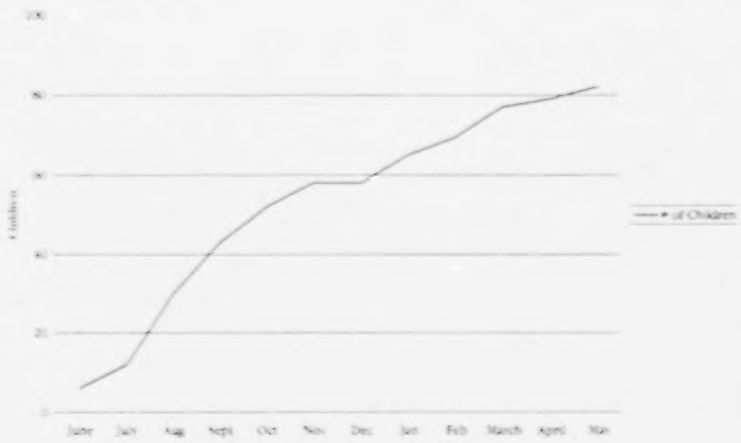
Parents' and Children's Perceptions of the Book Loan Program

In the last year, as the research team has built friendships as well as trust with the parents, we have learned that having access to books is very important and meaningful to them. The following anecdote from the library staff member's field notes attests to this.

> Ms Alvarez (pseudonym, a single mother of two) ran into the preschool at 10 minutes after 5:00 p.m. to pick up her children; she stopped to check out a book and as she was signing the book I asked how she was doing. Her response was that she had "been ironing for the last nine hours and that she was exhausted, but still had to hurry home on the bus, cook dinner for her two children, bathe them, and prepare everything for the next day." As she was leaving she looked up and said, "Thank you teacher for waiting for me and making this easier for us."

Such an example shows that immigrant parents such as these, often mistakenly portrayed as uninterested in their children's school progress (cf. Delgado-Gaitan, 1996, for a refutation of this view), frequently overcome considerable personal obstacles to ensure that their children have books. Therefore, the convenience of the book loan program serves a very real purpose, as expressed plainly by another parent: "The parents are always very tired and have both financial as well as transportation problems and therefore cannot frequent the public library."

Figure 6. Chart showing number of children participating in the book loan program.



Another positive feature of the loan program mentioned frequently by parents is the friendly and accessible staff, who are also able to communicate with the parents in their primary language. Having this opportunity to discuss educational issues with someone "in the system" is highly valued. Early in the fall of last year, when the loan program had not been operating for about a week and a half due to scheduling problems, a parent stopped by the program and informed a research team member how worried some of the parents were because they thought that the loan library had been can-

celed just as their children were becoming used to having more books in the home.

Table 1: Students favorite books according to check-out frequency.

1. Hill, E. (1996). *Dónde está Spot?* New York: Puffin Books.
2. McGrath, B. B. (1994). *The M & M's brand chocolate candies counting book.* Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge Publishing.
3. McGrath, B. B. (1998). *The Cheerio's counting book.* New York: Scholastic.
4. Brown, M. T., & Syverson, J. (1994). *Arturo y sus problemas.* Boston: Little Brown & Co.
5. Bernthal, M. S., Sharp, C., & McGlothlin, D. (1995). *El gran globo de Barney.* Allen, TX: Barney Publishing.
6. Bernthal, M. S., & White, A. S. (1995). *La banda de Barney y Baby Bop.* Allen, TX: Barney Publishing.
7. McGraw, S., Munsch, N., & Langer, S. (1992). *Siempre te querre.* Willowdale, Ontario: Firefly Books.
8. Bridwell, N., & Mlawer, T. (1998). *Clifford y el gran desfile.* New York: Scholastic Trade.

The children themselves have expressed a great interest in the loan program. For example, one day, as the book loan coordinator was walking into the preschool, a child yelled out with excitement "Look! It's the book lady!" His mother then explained that he had been waiting with anticipation that afternoon for the loan program to finally open. In addition, parents concede that their children now show considerable interest in being read to at home and that this situation has created additional opportunities to interact with them. As one parent wrote in the questionnaire, "Having these books to read allows me to spend more time with my daughter."

Parents' Beliefs About Literacy and Home Practices

The research team has also learned more about the high value that parents place on books, how they should be treated, and what activities occur in the home around them. During a conversation about the importance of books in the home, Ms. Hidalgo mentioned that she tries to instill the importance of valuing and respecting books in the children in her community, as the following anecdote illustrates:

> We teach our children to respect the books. . . I tell them that if they tear the page out of a book it hurts the book and it is like tearing off a person's arm—it hurts. We teach them to take care of things and books because we do not have the money to buy more or replace them . . . that is what I mean by respect for books.

In addition, 3 out of the 11 parents who responded to the survey used the books to teach letter-sound correspondence (cf. Goldenberg, 1990). For example, Ms. Estrada mentioned that she used the books to teach her children the sounds of the words as well as how to form them. She further shared that, when she read, she would have her daughter repeat the lines after her. The more common response, however, from 7 of the 11 parents,

was a focus upon the illustrations and the meaning of the stories (cf. Yaden, 1993; Yaden, Smolkin, & MacGillivray, 1993). When asked what strategies she used to read, Ms. Feliz, though she herself had difficulty reading, stated, "I use the pictures. . . . I first describe the pictures and then make up a story."

This latter group of parents stated that they attempted to make the stories come alive for their children, not only for enjoyment's sake, but also because they believed that their children's understanding of the concepts would be increased. When asked what she was thinking while reading a book to her daughter, one mother reported that she "pretends" to be a character in the story and "acts it out" to make the story seem more animated. Her thoughts were that this activity "facilitated" or increased comprehension of the story for her child. Further, on the questionnaire item that asked about her thoughts when reading, a parent mentioned the long-term effects she believed accrued for her daughter. "When I read to my daughter I think that she is learning something new and that it benefits her and motivates her to continue her studies."

Parents' Expectations of the Book Loan Program

Almost all of the parents on the questionnaire (10/11) mentioned that they were interested in learning more about what reading method they could employ to increase their child's interest and comprehension of the storybooks, because some felt that they lacked "imagination," "ideas," and "reading strategies" to use when they read with their children. One form of evidence of this interest has been the turnout at the miniworkshops held in conjunction with the book loan receptions. In the two receptions combined, approximately 100 parents attended the miniworkshops on various aspects of book-handling (see Figure 3 for an example of some of the topics covered). Additionally, during the workshops, many of the parents mentioned that they were interested in having access to more "instructional books"—in other words, books that showed letter-sound relationships and taught phonemic awareness as well as vocabulary words. Specifically, a parent said, "We need books that show the letter with the sound it makes and a picture of it . . . or books that show how the children can imitate what mouth movement corresponds to each letter sound." Several parents mentioned that they were drawing on how they were taught to read in their countries as well as the "phonics method that we have heard about from teachers."

Discussion

As part of a comprehensive emergent literacy intervention program in an urban, high poverty, bilingual preschool setting, the book loan program has dynamically evolved into an important strand linking home and school. It has also been our experience that parents' literacy beliefs and home practices cannot be accessed by simply giving a survey. Meeting with the parents regularly, gaining their confidence, and listening to them have played inte-

gral roles in helping us understand how the program has been successful in achieving its primary goal of increasing access to books for families. These activities have also served the secondary purpose of allowing us to acquire information about the nature of home and community literacy environments, the types of literacy knowledge the children already possess and those they are developing, and the individuals with whom they interact during book reading at home. These secondary purposes will be pursued explicitly during the second and third years of the implementation of the loan program.

In reflecting on the implementation of the book loan aspect of the larger project, several key ideas have emerged that we see as critically important to its ongoing success: (a) providing easy access to literacy materials, (b) providing access to culturally sensitive and language-sensitive materials, (c) maintaining a convenient location and setup, (d) fostering parent-child interactions, (e) building links between home and school, (f) responding to parent needs, and (g) reinforcing book reading for pleasure and didactic purposes. During the following discussion, we expand briefly upon each one of these, and in a final section we propose some future areas of inquiry which seem promising to pursue in light of our current findings.

Providing Easy Access to Literacy Materials

A central purpose of any book-lending program serving parents in high-poverty areas should be easy access to books. This is especially important to parents who have few books or other literacy materials appropriate for children in their home. Nearly all of the parents of the children participating in the book loan program rush into the preschool to pick up their child; the majority are either rushing to catch a bus home or have a ride waiting outside. Therefore, they need to get in and out of the preschool as quickly as possible. In the present program, they can quickly peruse the titles arranged along the counter (see Figure 1), pick one out with their child, sign it out in the log book and be on their way home within three to four minutes. The parents have acknowledged that they do not have time or, oftentimes, transportation to get to a public library. Without the easy access to books at the preschool site, most would not be able to make a trip to a library to check out books for their child.

Providing Access to Culturally Sensitive and Language-Sensitive Materials

In addition to having access to literacy materials, having access to culturally sensitive and language-sensitive materials is important in our project. We have seen the value of having books that celebrate cultural and linguistic diversity, especially in a bilingual context in which all but one student speaks Spanish as a primary or second language. These books connect more closely to students' background experiences and reinforce a sense of cultural pride. Even though California schools are laboring under the shadow of the implementation of Proposition 187, which has outlawed bilingual education and is further aimed at denying schooling to the children of immigrant parents, the fact that six out of the eight most popular books (see Table 1)

are written in Spanish speaks to the transcendent power of one's own native language, even in the face of being discriminated against for using it.

Maintaining a Convenient Location and Setup

The book loan program is not set up to compete with local public libraries, since the selection of books is limited and the setup (while inviting) is streamlined for fast checkout as opposed to leisurely browsing (although browsing does happens at times, when parents have more time). The parents and their children do not need to go a special room set aside for storing and checking out books; in fact, they cannot avoid walking through the book loan area, since they must pass through the hallway to pick up their children. With very little prompting, the preschool children initiate the check-out by pulling their parents over to the display of books and selecting a book they want to take home. Since check-out procedures are informal and less intimidating than in a public library, books are easier to obtain and the atmosphere is conducive to brief and frequent exchanges about the events of the day.

Fostering Parent-Child Interactions

As reported data show, the increase in the number of participants in the programs as well as the average number of books checked out monthly (see Figures 4–6) indicate that there are increased opportunities for parents and children to sit together for a few minutes to share and talk about a book. Given the many stresses on families living in economically depressed areas, fostering positive parent-child interactions is a strong asset of the program. Without access to these books, it is assumed that very few of the parents would be able to go to the library on a consistent basis to check out books. Thus, with less access to books, fewer opportunities would exist to engage in joint literacy interactions.

Building Links Between Home and School

Another strength of the program is that it has encouraged links between literacy learning and interaction with books in the classroom and home. While students can find books that have been read to them in class at a public library, locating the books on the shelves is a challenge. The book loan program was set up to offer many titles for check-out that were also purchased for the two four-year-old classroom libraries. Thus, students have the opportunity to choose books that are introduced by the teachers and read aloud in class to reread at home with their parents. Additionally, unlike classroom "take-home" books (e.g., Whitehurst, Epstein, et al., 1994), the loan program is not assigned homework. Instead, it relies on self-selection of texts by the students and parents and their motivation to participate in the program.

Responding to Parent Needs

Another unique feature of the book loan program is its responsiveness to the needs and questions of the parents. Since the on-site library is staffed by a bilingual member of the research team, she makes personal contact with each family in the program. As a result, parents have developed trust and a friendly relationship with this member of the research team in particular. They feel comfortable knowing they have a voice that is heard and that impacts the program. In addition, when occasionally a parent is running late to pick up his or her child and needs to run to catch a bus home, the team member facilitates the check-in and check-out so that the parent and child leave with a book in their hands. Also parents have made ongoing suggestions about the types of books they would like to have available. For example, some parents have requested more Spanish books, while others prefer English books. Additional requests have been made for books about particular characters, like Barney and Clifford, as well as concept, alphabet, and counting books and stories about farm animals.

In addition, the two parent receptions honoring book loan participants have been important in that miniworkshops provide opportunties for parents to share the strategies they are using when reading aloud, interact with other parents about the importance of reading with their child at home, and discuss ways to develop their child's concepts about print and knowledge about the uses of various types of literacy materials.

Reinforcing Book Reading for Pleasure and Didactic Purposes

As indicated above, parents have been interested in learning additional strategies for book-reading with their children. While they have commented to the researchers that they enjoy reading at home, they also point out the importance of using books to learn together. Given the nature of the high-poverty community in which they live, parents are sensitive to the academic challenges their children may face upon entering an elementary school which will have a stronger emphasis on achievement while providing less primary-language support. Therefore, parents' requests for concept books, alphabet and counting books, and phonics-type books are understandable, as they wish to help their child succeed in school.

Promising Areas of Future Inquiry

As participation in the book loan program has increased, additional questions have arisen around both the home and classroom use of books and the characteristics of the books themselves. For example, the teachers of the four-year-olds have mentioned that children involved in the book loan program show more attention to literacy activities in the classroom than do the children who are not participating (cf. also Whitehurst, Epstein, et al., 1994). Thus, it may be that the additional opportunities afforded by the book loan program outside of school are influencing the children's behavior with books in school. Subsequently, the research team is exploring this possibility

by (a) creating additional indices for measuring book loan participation that can be used as covariates in future analysis, (b) arranging home visits with participating and nonparticipating children to observe their extant literacy behaviors and activities, and (c) attempting to differentiate within the classroom, if possible, both the quality and quantity of literacy behaviors exhibited by book loan children and their nonparticipating peers.

Another interesting area identified earlier by Goldenberg et al. (1992) and noted in our study is parents' tendency to use books at home for primarily didactic purposes to teach letter-sound correspondences, numbers, colors, etc. We wonder, however, if the simplified nature of the texts sent home in past studies (cf. Goldenberg et al., 1992; Phillips et al., 1996; Whitehurst, Arnold, et al., 1994; Whitehurst, Epstein, et al., 1994) does not particularly lend itself to this type of activity. In the present study, while we have responded to parents' requests for books to teach counting, the alphabet, shapes, and so forth, we have also attempted to make available quality children's literature in Spanish. During the next year, we plan to keep close track of the types of genres being checked out, while simultaneously emphasizing to the parents how important book interactions are around rhyming and song (see Barclay, 1999; Christensen & Oehlkers, 1999), graphic and aesthetic appreciation (Kiefer, 1994), and personal experiences with literature (see Gauthier & Yaden, 1999; Wolf & Heath, 1995). We are interested in seeing whether the increased availability of high-quality literature and informal discussions with parents at the lending library will influence the kinds of books that are checked out and the nature of the home read-aloud activities.

Finally, the research team would like to more closely observe actual parent-child storybook reading in the home to see if these children follow patterns of response similar to other populations of preschoolers (cf. Yaden, 1993; Yaden, Smolkin, & Conlon, 1989). In addition, we would like to study the children's emergent readings (Sulzby, 1994) with particular emphasis on the types of "importations" which occur (see Elster, 1995, 1998).

Conclusion

In summary, we attribute the current success of the book loan program to a number of factors that work together to make it a dynamic and responsive program that seeks not only to provide access to literacy materials but also to enhance literacy learning at home. As the dialogue and relationship between the parents and the research team grows, supplemental information will be gathered that will be used to guide additional strands of the overall emergent literacy intervention research project in which the lending program functions as a key component. These strands will explore in more depth the literacy practices in the home and community and attempt to develop a better understanding of the existing funds of knowledge (cf. Moll, 1998; Moll et al., 1992) in the community that impact literacy learning.

Appendix A: Preliminary Assessment Tool

Demographics:

Respondent (mother, father):_____ Level of education:_____
Generation in the United States_____ Years in the U.S.:_____

1. How do you feel the Book Loan Program is functioning for you? Why do you think these books are being made available to your children?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Are you interested in checking out the books? ☐ YES ☐ NO or do you take them because your child insists that you do? Why does it interest you to check the books out? Or Why does it *not* interest you to check the books out?

_____

_____

_____

3. What do you and your child do with the book when you take it home? For example:
- ☐ Read it with my child. If so when?/ If not, why not?
- ☐ Allow my child to play with the book. If so, what does the child do with the book?

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. What are you thinking about when you are reading the book to your child?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. What reading strategies do you use when you read to your child or teach reading? (For example, you look at the pictures). Do you teach your child how to read? ☐ YES ☐ NO Where did you learn the strategies you use to read? For example, did you learn them at school or were they taught to you in the home by your siblings or parents or other family members?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

6. Do you wish you knew more about how to handle books or could learn about what reading strategies to use or teach?

☐ YES ☐ NO If so why?/If not, why not?

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. What are your thoughts about literacy? For example, do you think or feel that it is important to know how to read and write? How early do you think that one should learn to read?

_____

_____

_____

_____

8. Would you like to have more books in your home? ☐YES ☐NO

Comments or suggestions:

_____

_____

_____

_____

THANK YOU

Appendix B: Book Loan Program Parent Responses

Access to Books	Literacy Practices (Funds of Knowledge)	Parent Expectations of Book Loan Program*
It is very convenient to have access to books at the preschool because the parents are very tired and have transportation problems and therefore cannot attend the public library	I describe the pictures and then provide a story by reading the text or I sometimes make up a story	Books with farm animals in both English and Spanish
Our children are getting used to having more books in the home	Use the books to teach the letter-sound relationship in order for my daughter to learn to form words and I use the words to teach meaning. I read and have her repeat after me	We are interested in learning more about what reading methods we can employ to increase the child's interest and comprehension of the book, because we felt that we sometimes lack imagination, ideas, and reading strategies to use when reading with our children
The program is helping motivate both us the parents and our children toward literacy learning	Ms. F who has difficulties with reading when asked what strategies she uses to read she said "I use the pictures, I first describe the pictures and then make up a story"	We want more instructional books. For example, books that show the letter + sound + the picture; and/or that the book shows how the children can imitate what the mouth movement is that corresponds to each letter sound.
We teach our children to respect the books; I tell them that if they tear the page out of a book it hurts the book and it is like tearing off a person's arm—it hurts; we teach them to take care of things and books because we do not have the money to buy more or replace them; that is what I mean by respect for books	When asked what she was thinking while reading the book to her daughter, Ms. G pretends that she is the character in the story and thus acts it out and then makes it more animated; her thoughts are that this facilitates or increases comprehension of the story for the child	I wish the library was open more often and that we could check out books more frequently
Having more books helps their mental development	I use reading for language development	
Having these books to read allows me to spend more time with my daughter	It is important for the children to use their imagination	
	Books can be used to teach colors	
	I use the words in the book for vocabulary	
	I use a book from Mexico that has a picture of a doll that shows the mouth movement that corresponds to each letter-sound so that my daughter can imitate it	
	I narrate according to the pictures then I ask her if she understood the story	
	When I read to her I think that she is learning something new and that it benefits her and motivates her to continue her studies further	
	I think about which way would be most fun to read to her so that she can understand it better	

* Qualitiative data from parent questionnaires (Version 10/98) and parent self-reports (7/14/98-11/1/98)

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About CIERA

The Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) is the national center for research on early reading and represents a consortium of educators in five universities (University of Michigan, University of Virginia, and Michigan State University with University of Southern California and University of Minnesota), teacher educators, teachers, publishers of texts, tests, and technology, professional organizations, and schools and school districts across the United States. CIERA is supported under the Educational Research and Development Centers Program, PR/Award Number R305R70004, as administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education.

Mission. CIERA's mission is to improve the reading achievement of America's children by generating and disseminating theoretical, empirical, and practical solutions to persistent problems in the learning and teaching of beginning reading.

CIERA Research Model

The model that underlies CIERA's efforts acknowledges many influences on children's reading acquisition. The multiple influences on children's early reading acquisition can be represented in three successive layers, each yielding an area of inquiry of the CIERA scope of work. These three areas of inquiry each present a set of persistent problems in the learning and teaching of beginning reading.

CIERA INQUIRY 1
Readers and Texts

Characteristics of readers and texts and their relationship to early reading achievement. What are the characteristics of readers and texts that have the greatest influence on early success in reading? How can children's existing knowledge and classroom environments enhance the factors that make for success?

CIERA INQUIRY 2
Home and School

Home and school effects on early reading achievment. How do the contexts of homes, communities, classrooms, and schools support high levels of reading achievement among primary-level children? How can these contexts be enhanced to ensure high levels of reading achievement for all children?

CIERA INQUIRY 3
Policy and Profession

Policy and professional effects on early reading achievement. How can new teachers be initiated into the profession and experienced teachers be provided with the knowledge and dispositions to teach young children to read well? How do policies at all levels support or detract from providing all children with access to high levels of reading instruction?

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